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PDT PATHWAYS

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Abstract

After completing the Master of Education (MEd) at Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED), most Professional Development Teachers (PDTs) enter a foggy zone where they have to grope to make a place for themselves. This paper is based on the experiences of two PDTs who found different paths to work on teachers' professional development.

The first PDT works as a school-based PDT, and hence the experience focuses on classroom teaching, student assessment, working with teachers at the school and the broader experience of working on professional development programmes. There is also an element of outreach as this PDT works with teachers of religion at the Ismaili Tariqa and Religious Educational Board (ITREB).

The second PDT's experiences are working with the Professional Development Centre (PDC) and its training programmes in the whole region of East Africa.

This paper looks at how the teachers translated elements of what they learn in professional development programmes into their classroom practice. It focuses on the differences in the teachers' attitudes towards teaching and their pupils, the teachers' classroom practices, their efforts at reflection. Evidence of impact is in the form of students' assessment scores, school results, teachers' comments during discussions, comments by head teachers and comments by parents.

The paper concludes with tentative suggestions as to why the impact was not as strong as it could have been. It looks at issues of school management and administration, lack of structures to support the teachers in school, and to some extent ineffective follow up of the professional programmes.

Introduction

After completing the MEd programme at AKU-IED, most of the PDTs entered a very foggy area where they had to grope around to make a place for themselves.

This paper is based on the experiences of two PDTs who found different paths to work on teachers' professional development. One PDT works as a school based PDT and, hence, her experiences are related to classroom teaching, students' assessment, working with teachers at school and the broader experience of working on professional programmes like the CE Programme. There is also an element of outreach through involvement with Ismaili Tariqa and Religious Education Board.

The second PDT's experiences are with the PDC and its training programmes. Her experiences cover the whole region of East Africa where the PDC conducts its programmes.

Though we took different paths, we travelled the same road of professional development. Through this paper we will share our experiences in working with teachers, some successes and some challenges. We feel that the impact of our work has been felt through different channels:

- Teachers' attitudes towards professional development
- Teachers' attitude towards teaching
- Teachers' attitude towards pupils
- Teachers' Classroom Practice
- Outreach

Successes

Teachers attitude towards the CE programmes

Many of the teachers who go through the CE programmes rate them very highly. Many of them find these programmes very unique yet very enriching to their teaching profession. In relation to this, one teacher in a speech read on behalf of all the CPs during a certification ceremony of CE Programme -English 2002 said:

I have attended several courses. Some of them took a whole academic year, while others took only a few weeks. But the Certificate in Education Programme (CE Programme) has proved totally different. It has affected

me to the core, changing my perceptions about myself as a teacher. It has, within a very short time, changed my practice and long cherished and entrenched philosophy about teaching, defying the old adage that ‘you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.’ What is the secret behind the CE Programme? Why is it so powerful, so persuasive that within a short time, it has not only changed me but also some of my pupils and colleagues. (PDC Bulletin, Vol. 2 Number 1, March 2003)

The above quotation sums it all up on what many CPs feel about the CE Programmes in East Africa.

Teachers’ attitude towards teaching

Attitude towards teaching profession

On the onset of all our CE Programmes, we begin the process of reconceptualisation with a session on “Talking about teaching” and a question “Why did you become a teacher?” More often than not the responses from the majority of the course participants is that, teaching was not a career of their choice, it was something they did because that was the only employment opportunity available at that time, or that they were influenced by parents who had been teachers. Most of the participants think of teaching as a job that needs to be done and it is a source of income. But later, the same participants talk about teaching as a “mother of all professions” as it is because of the work of teachers that people can go into so many prestigious professions. They talk of teachers being “the mirrors of society” as teachers reflect the values of society and try to inculcate the same values in the pupils they teach. They also talk of teachers being the “lamps that dispel the darkness and help children to come to the light” We feel that the programmes AKU-IED, and we conduct, help the teachers to view themselves and the teaching profession in a different and more positive light. When teachers value the work they do, it builds their self esteem and confidence and they are encouraged to do their best for the children they teach.

Attitude towards being observed by colleagues.

The second phase of the Certificate in Education programmes is a field based phase when the CPs are back in the classrooms trying to put into practice the new strategies they acquire in Phase 1. During this phase, they are observed and supported by the PDTs. The CPs who had worked in a culture of “inspection” where the only time they are

observed is when they are being inspected and evaluated, initially look upon the Phase 2 observations as inspection. As a result, they tend to feel threatened and totally ill at ease at the prospect of being observed in their classrooms. Colleagues of CPs being observed are full of sympathy for their predicament. When I was at the Aga Khan Primary School in Mombasa, I heard teachers calling out to the CPs who were going to be observed, “Good luck with the assessment, don’t worry, you will do well”

However, by the end of Phase 2, and after the programme the attitude of the CPs was very different. They realized that lesson observation was actually helpful in improving their classroom practice. An instance I would like to share here is when I went to the SOS primary school in Mombasa four months after the completion of the CE Programme for teachers of Mathematics. One of the CPs of that programme had just come out of a colleague’s (not a CP) classroom where he had been doing a demonstration lesson to show the use of a teaching aid he had prepared. When he saw me, he exclaimed that he wished I had come earlier so that I could have observed him.

The situation at Loreto Primary School in Mombasa now has a very healthy working environment where teachers observe each others’ lessons when they are not teaching themselves. There seems to be evidence that in some schools, the attitude of isolation and rivalry is slowly dissolving, and an attitude of mutual support and encouragement is taking its place. We can see our objective of promoting collegiality among teachers taking a concrete form beyond the confines of the programmes.

Teachers’ attitude towards the pupils

Use of children’s ideas

During the follow-up workshops, one thing that keeps on coming up is the change of teachers’ attitude towards their pupils. For example CPs in Kampala agreed that the programme made them realize that children, if given opportunities can come up with many relevant ideas related to what is being taught.

Specifically one Science teacher cited a situation where she had only four points in relation to a concept she was teaching. However, when she asked the pupils, they came up with many more relevant points that she had never thought of. She therefore started learning from the children and used their ideas in the classroom teaching and learning process.

Children's contribution to teaching and learning resources

The above same CP talked of how she has realized that she can involve the children in the development of teaching and learning resources. She cited a day when one pupil brought a bird, which she used to teach about birds in the classroom. This incident made the lesson very enjoyable and the pupils were very excited.

The above two examples seem indicate that in some CPs' classrooms, there is an aspect of pupils ownership of their own learning.

Discontinuation of the use of the cane

Some of the CPs, after the CE Programme programmes are realizing that to be able to create an enabling classroom environment, where children can learn, the use of the cane should be avoided. Two teachers, one in Kampala and one in Mombasa, who strongly believed that children could not learn without the use of the cane confessed in follow-up workshops that, since the completion of the programme, they had ceased to use the cane in their classroom and the children had become more free to participate than it was before when the cane was in use. In fact the Kampala CP had gone as far as conducting a workshop in her school for the other teachers advocating against the use of the cane in order to promote pupils leaning.

Classroom practice

PDTs own classroom practice

My own classroom practice has undergone changes after my MEd at AKU-IED. I used to enjoy being the focus of the students' attention, the person in charge of everything that went on in the classroom. "Teacher talk" was the norm in my classes a lot of the time. I used to believe that the more I could tell students the more they would learn.

Once I resumed teaching at my school, my focus changed. Now it was the students who were the focus, my objective was to enable them to create and arrive at their own understanding. My subject specialization is Literature and actually my teaching became a lot more exciting and challenging. My lessons are lively with plenty of discussions where the students air their views and challenge each other's ideas. Therefore this has led to more students opting to study literature than before.

Students' performance

One of the major concerns of the CPs during the CE Programmes is that the new approaches are “time consuming” and they are not sure whether the approaches will yield good examination results. What we are asking them to do is abandon “tried and tested methods of teaching which bring good examination results” When the CPs try out new strategies in their classes, they are indeed taking a risk. One of the participants of the VTP2000 - English told us that in the national examination (KCPE) the mean grade for her students was actually higher in 2000, 2001 than it had been in 1999. For her and her school, (a government school in Mombasa) this was a great achievement. The head teacher was so pleased that he decided that the teacher should always teach the examination candidates as her results were so good. She attributes her rate of success to the strategies she now uses in class, strategies she learnt at the CE Programme.

Another success story was related by another teacher of a government school in Mombasa, who attended the CE Programme 2002 - Mathematics. This teacher said that after she started to use strategies she had learnt at the CE Programme the lowest mark her students scored was 45% compared to 25% which was the lowest score before her participation in the CE Programme.

Use of cooperative learning

One of the “visible signs” of participation in a CE Programme is the seating arrangement in the class. A big majority of the CPs arrange their students in groups. This group arrangement has now become a regular feature of CPs' classes. They are using cooperative learning with varying degrees of success. The heartening thought is that they are definitely trying to implement cooperative learning. Many of them feel that cooperative learning helps them in classroom management. One CP at one of our co-operating schools (private school) said, “Now the pupils themselves help to maintain discipline as group members monitor behaviour. Pupils help in teaching the group members who have not understood the teacher.”

Use of visual aids and displays

Most of the course participants pick up the idea of using visual aids and displays in their classes during the CE Programmes. This has become evident during the monitoring exercises which are undertaken six months after the CE Programme. Teachers also display students' work. One head teacher of one School in Mombasa commented “We always

used to tell our teachers to put up interesting things on the class bulletin boards. But what used to happen is that the teachers would cover the boards with some posters and these would remain for the whole year even when they became tattered. Now the teachers are asking for materials with which they make their own aids and displays and these are on the board for a while and then new ones are put up. We also see some of the things the pupils are doing on the boards like compositions and graphs and so on.”

One of our CPs of CE Programme 2002 - Mathematics, had taught the concept of time to her Class 3 just before she came to the CE Programme and felt that her pupils had found the concept very difficult as their test score showed. During the first phase of the mathematics CE Programme, she appreciated the idea of using teaching aids to explain concepts. During the practicum in Phase 2, she re-taught the concept now using visual aids to teach time and was very happy that the children understood the concept so much better. She said, “Now you can ask them any question on time and they can answer.”

Course participants becoming more “marketable”

One of the rather unexpected outcomes of the programmes is that the CPs who attend our programmes and are doing well in their own schools are actually being lured away by other schools. It is being realized that these teachers are doing extremely well and the other schools (who are as yet not our cooperating schools) are offering attractive packages in order to get their services! Two private schools in Mombasa and one private school in Nairobi have lost their CP teachers in this way. The proprietor of one of the schools said, “Believe it or not, the VT certificate is a very powerful tool which the teachers have to get better paid jobs.” He had lost two teachers after the 2001 programme and was bitter about it. Now the cooperating schools are devising ways of holding on to their teachers so that they remain in their schools. Some of the government school teachers have been promoted to the post of deputy head teachers after they have gone through the programmes and started doing better in their classes. In Mombasa and Nairobi, when schools are considering job applications from teachers, preference is being given to teachers who had attended CE Programmes.

Although this mobility of teachers away from the sponsoring schools defeats our purpose of building capacity for school improvement, it does seem to indicate that teachers are benefiting from the programmes. In this case there is negative but also positive impact of the programmes.

Outreach

Two important links are being made from last year. Last year we invited participants from Kenya School Improvement Programme (KENSIP), an Aga Khan Foundation project. The participant who came for the CE Programme for Mathematics was a Programme Officer who worked with a number of schools on the outskirts of Mombasa. His participation in the CE Programme was an important step in forging links with KENSIP and since he is also working with teachers, the ripple effect of the CE Programme will, hopefully, take place. It is as yet too early to talk about impact in that link.

In the CE Programme in Zanzibar this year, two of our understudies belong to Teacher Resource Centres (TRC) where they are working as teachers advisers. They discussed with us how they were going to use the materials of the CE Programme to do workshops with their clusters of teachers in their resource centres. It is too early to talk about the impact of these outreach efforts, but we are optimistic about the ripple effects of the CE Programme through these outreach efforts.

A second link that has been formed is with ITREB, Mombasa. We had invited participation from ITREB and they had sent one participant in 2000. Since March this year, I have been appointed the member responsible for training of the ITREB teachers. In this capacity I conduct workshops on various areas for them. The teachers are volunteer teachers and not professionally trained teachers. These teachers find the training sessions very useful and are using quite a lot of activity based teaching in their classes. One interesting observation is that these teachers have no prior training and are “fresh” with no deep rooted beliefs about teaching. They find it easier to absorb new ideas as they have not come with preconceived ideas about teaching and learning. It has been noted that now more children are attending religion classes than in the past, so the teachers must be doing some good work.

CP associations

On completion of each of our CE Programmes, the CPs form an association. Though the formation of these associations is still in its infancy stage in the region, the fact that teachers can come together after the CE programmes and agree that form associations where they can still support and learn from one another and thus continue to professionally develop is something to be applauded. This indicates that teachers value what they the knowledge and skills they acquired from the programmes and would like to continue using these in their classrooms.

In different bases, the Associations are at different stages of formation.

Dar-es-Salaam: Association of Professional Teachers

The executive committee has come up with the constitution that has been presented, amended and endorsed by the members of the association.

The sub-committees representing the different subject groups are in the process of finding out what activities teachers can involve themselves in, in terms of relevant workshops, etc.

A patron has been identified, who is willing to assist the association both professionally and finically.

The process of registering the association is going on.

Nairobi: Professional Development Teachers Association

The executive committee has come up with a constitution waiting to be presented and hopefully endorsed by the members in September. After this, registration will be done.

Kampala, Mombasa, Zanzibar

In the above bases, the executive committees are in the process of formulating a constitution for each of the associations.

Challenges and concerns

CP associations

Mobilization of teachers

It takes a lot of time and energy to mobilize teachers to attend the association meetings. At times, meetings are cancelled due to lack of quorum.

Funding

Funds are required by these associations if they are to organize and carry out activities for the teachers. The subscription fee to be paid by both the teachers and the schools is

inadequate for the above purpose.

However, it is hoped that after the registration of the associations donors like the British council will be approached for support

PDT support

The associations are coordinated by PDTs who have full time jobs in schools. It is therefore a challenge for them to find time to organize and conduct the associations meetings.

Ripple effect of the CE Programme

Upon completion of the programme, CPs are expected to share whatever they learnt from the programmes with other teachers in their respective schools. However, this is not happening to the scale that we expect it to. This may be happening due to lack of lack of appropriate and relevant structures in the schools that can enable the CPs to work with other teachers in their schools. The PDC is therefore proposing to incorporate the concept of mentoring in the CE Programmes.

In addition, starting with this year's programmes, head teachers will have to participate in some sessions of action planning. This might make the head teachers to have obligations of ensuring that what has been planned for is implemented in their schools.

School inspectors

In government schools, school inspectors appraise and evaluate schools and their teachers. One of the aspects they evaluate is the teachers' classroom teaching.

From the CPs comments on school inspectors, it appears that they (inspectors) still belong to the old school of thought of traditional teaching. As a result, when they observe the CPs lessons, they find their teaching methods contradictory to their beliefs. These inspectors question and criticize the CPs teaching methods both verbally and in their reports. This therefore sometimes discourages the CPs from implementing more of the new approaches in their classrooms.

Due to the above concern the Ministry of Education and Culture of Tanzania with initiative from one of the PDTs who works with this ministry in the department of teacher

education is planning to conduct a course for school inspectors to make them aware of the current trends in education.

Constraints of language

CE Programmes in East Africa are conducted in English language. However, in some parts of the region the medium of instruction in schools is Kiswahili. Therefore the English proficiency level of some of our participants is considerably low. At times the CPS have difficulty comprehending concepts of the course. Consequently this may hinder some CPs from implementing the concepts leave alone sharing them with other teachers in their schools.

Due to the above challenge, sometimes both English and Kiswahili languages have to be used during the course. One may wonder whether these concepts that are translated from English to Kiswahili will be understood appropriately and have the same impact on the CPs if they were understood in English.

Reflection

One question, which has been nagging at us, is the question of Reflection. The CPs do not maintain their reflective journals after the programme. Does this mean these teachers are not reflective teachers? Is a written reflective journal the only evidence? A lot of the impact of the CE Programmes we are conducting is not visible in the concrete sense, a lot of the impact is felt in the change of attitudes of the CPs. The final question, when we cannot provide concrete evidence of the impact, does it mean that the impact is not there?